

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
September 22, 2009**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on Tuesday, September 22, 2009 at the Hilton Garden Inn, Cascade Room A, 401 East Yakima Avenue, Yakima, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Carol Moser, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Dan O'Neal and Latisha Hill.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Moser called the meeting to order and introduced Commissioners and staff. She acknowledged the presence of Representative Norm Johnson.

**TRANSPORTATION 101 – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AND PLANNING
IN WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION**

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, Transportation Commission, provided a presentation on the distribution of transportation revenues.

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Gary Ekstedt, County Engineer, shared information on Yakima County's local roads. He indicated that about 570 road miles within the county are gravel farm to market roads. These roads are designated as local access and are ineligible for many forms of grant money, which essentially leaves the county dependant on local revenues to maintain these roads. Counties have the ability to levy roads up to \$2.25/\$1000 assessed value to provide roads, but this money can be shifted to other uses. Yakima County road levy is at about \$2.11 today, which is a drop from 10 years ago when it was close to \$2.25. Initiative 695 limits the annual property tax increase to 1 percent plus new construction. Property values in Yakima County have already begun to decline. County road revenue is increasing in dollars, but decreasing substantially in value using the WSDOT Construction Cost Index (CCI). From 1990 to 2008, road revenue has increased an average of 4.7% per year while CCI is 6.6% a year. Cities and counties receive only one cent of the 9.5 cent gas tax collected for transportation projects statewide. In 2006 Yakima County's gas tax collection was at a high, but from August 2008 through August 2009 gas tax receipts were down by \$185 thousand.

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Mayor Dave Edler, City of Yakima, shared that the city's population is 84 thousand, with a total population for the county of 240 thousand. Although Yakima County is the 2nd largest county geographically two thirds of the land in the county is owned by the federal government or the Yakama Nation and is non-taxable. He moved on to discuss freight priorities, economic development and the challenges of limited funding for local street maintenance/preservation and pedestrian safety projects. The three main industries that

rely on transportation and impact Yakima as the regional center are; agriculture and the weight of trucks on the roads; the access for emergency vehicles; tourism and recreation must co-exist with industrial and agricultural needs. At least 20 to 25% of city streets are now failing and have an annual maintenance/preservation cost of \$1.5 million, \$600,000 of which is for local access streets. Several partnerships are leveraged to build projects such as:

- Yakima Downtown Futures Initiative
- Yakima Sawmill LIFT
- River Road Industrial Corridor
- Washington Avenue
- Yakima Railroad Grade Separation Project

The City of Yakima estimates it needs \$104 million over 20 years for its transportation system, including over \$30 million for maintenance. With the reopening of Stampede Pass in 1996 there is an increased need for grade separation in the city. The Lincoln Avenue grade separation (\$35 million project) is a good partnership example. It will provide up to 161 jobs at an average wage of \$30 per hour, compared to the average wage of \$17 per hour Yakima County wage.

The strategic priority of the City of Yakima is to support projects with regional impacts such as:

- Arterial improvements
- Railroad grade separations
- Gateway Corridor Improvement Project (on old mill site)

Commissioner Distler remarked that he is supportive of looking at other funding sources i.e. taxes. He remarked that those who best understand local transportation needs are in the ideal position to educate others in their localities about how those needs may be met by supporting appropriate tax measures.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Yakima Valley Conference of Governments

Page Scott, Executive Director, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, shared that the YVCOG has many local partnerships that work together on local transportation issues, which is of great benefit to the region.

Trent Marquis, Chair of Trans-Action, shared that Trans-Action works together with local businesses and governments to identify goals and priorities and provides support moving forward. He explained that the common goal of the group is to encourage economic vitality by developing a list of prioritized transportation strategies to meet the long-range needs of the Yakima area, as well as exploring funding opportunities for identified projects. He shared some of the challenges and successes.

Jesse Palacios, Chair of DRYVE, explained that DRYVE's goal is to speak in one voice to aide local residents and state and federal lawmaker's in understanding and supporting transportation needs of rural communities. DRYVE supports efforts to seek dedicated and securely funded rural transit/mobility services to connect and compliment limited transportation services currently available to cities and communities in the rural Yakima area.

Yakama Nation

Ralph Sampson Jr., Chairman of Yakama Nation, emphasized that tribal government appreciates open government to government consultation. He explained that tribal government has transportation planning staff available to coordinate with local government and other interests to work on transportation needs and challenges in the area. He emphasized that the tribal government would like to see transportation projects go “greener”. He praised the public transit system services that are provided in the valley. In closing he expressed that DRYVE has been very helpful in getting Pahto Public Passage services up and running. This service has been of great value to tribal members that can not afford vehicles or fuel.

Commissioner Forner expressed that it would be helpful if tribes could identify artifacts and sacred areas early on in a project.

Regional Transit issues in Central Washington

Ms. Scott explained that besides staffing the YVCOG there is also a history of staffing the now dormant/extinct Public Transit Benefit Area in the 1990s. The PTBA has been absorbed by the MPO/RTPO which continues to work with local government to aide in providing public transit services within Yakima County. Only 41% of county residents have access to public transit.

She explained that the Community Connector to towns in the lower valley is state-funded. It connects Ben Franklin Transit, Yakima Transit as well as Pahto Public Passage. The Vanpool program is growing, but since Yakima Transit is a city system, vanpools need a Yakima Connection (14 vans go to Hanford Reservation).

Yakima Transit began in 1966 and has been funded with 3 percent sales tax since 1981. There was a two-year grant to extend service to the Selah area and Union Gap area. Selah has subsequently voted to tax itself for Yakima Transit service. Union Gap created its own transit service (after two votes). Union Gap transit service is provided through contract with Tri-City Transportation.

Yakima Transit has a new CMAQ grant to service Terrace Heights: Sno-Kist plant, the Osteopathic School, and other places. It has only 10 routes but very high ridership -- almost 1.5 million passengers last year. There is a constant request for service to Ellensburg. There is a need to better serve Moxee and the West Valley.

Yakima County is a Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) community, with a variety of attitudes toward it. YVCOG’s approach to CTR is “Make it easy and be a resource.” Spend resources on those employers who want it; use minimal compliance enforcement with others. Try to make it painless.

Madelyn Carlson, CEO, People for People, explained that People for People’s primary purpose is to provide public transportation to those most vulnerable in the community. Public transportation allows individuals to maintain their quality of life and remain independent. Continued partnerships with local and federal government and the Yakama

Nation is the key to keeping things moving forward. She recognized the Yakama Nation for its continued partnership with People for People. In closing she touched on Pahto Public Passage services, a fare free service, provided by the Yakama Nation as a community connector.

Karen Allen, Yakima Transit, provided a bit of history on local transit and an overview of transit funding and facts. She explained the types of services offered by Yakima Transit that include; regular fixed routes, Dial-A-Ride (paratransit), vanpool service and a transit information center. She pointed out that transit ridership is high even though the service area is small. She emphasized there are a lot of service needs that are still unmet.

Ron Davis, Union Gap Transit, shared that Union Gap Transit service provides a 30-minute pulse, or frequency of service as well as operating a Dial-A-Ride service. Currently the service operates on a 2 percent sales tax and has reserve operating funds available to consider expanding westward.

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (WSDOT) REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Troy Suing, Assistant Director, South Central Region, WSDOT, provided an overview of local highway projects that have been completed and projects currently under construction on various highways within the region. He briefly touched on the status of the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass project at Easton.

TOPICS IN TRANSPORTATION AND AGRICULTURE

Ken Casavant, Professor, WSU, shared that he recently finished working on a USDA/USDOT study of agricultural transport focusing on rates, service and performance. The final report is under review, but findings indicate that:

- Rail rates have decreased since Staggers Act, except for last 4 years.
- During years when railroads didn't earn a lot, producers expected that rates would soften.
- Allowed fuel surcharges increased at a rate higher than fuel costs
- Rail may need public investment
- Barge shipment has capacity and aging issues; size of locks in Midwest.
- Dredging on Columbia is problematic.
- Trucking has been hit hardest in this recession.
- Loss of trucking firms could be a problem when demand picks up again.
- Agriculture has had some exemptions from Combination Drivers License and other licensing requirements; this may now be an interstate commerce issue.

Robin Pollard, Executive Director, Washington Wine Commission, shared that the Washington Wine Commission established by the legislature in 1987 represents every licensed winery and wine grape grower in Washington State and provides a marketing platform to raise positive awareness of the state's wine industry. This industry plays a significant role in rural economic development, has doubled in growth over the last four years, and has contributed over \$4 billion to the state's economy. There are no vital

transportation issues other than moving tourists and products, although it is critical that the mountain passes be kept open during the winter. The Wine Commission is interested in the ferry system because there are wineries on the Olympic Peninsula and in the San Juan Islands. Air transportation to Eastern Washington is critical to wine tourism because it provides an option other than driving to Walla Walla. Train access to the region would be nice because wine producers depend on tourism and wine sales out of their tasting rooms. Some of the wineries are utilizing Railex to ship their products because it provides quick, safe transportation to the East Coast

Don Guthrie, Director of Orientation and Training, LTI/Milky Way, shared that his company has 16 companies that operate under Lynden Transportation hauling milk, juice and wine. He explained that the company emphasizes the critical importance of on-time pick up and delivery of perishable goods to market. He emphasized the importance of roads remaining open 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week because time cost money and there is a ripple effect. There are major economic impacts associated with road and mountain pass closures. The company appreciates the fact that their employees were willing to work extra hours during the weather crises last year. He expressed his appreciation to WSDOT and the Commission for being proactive.

Mark Powers, Vice President, Northwest Horticultural Council, explained that the Northwest Horticultural Council was incorporated in 1947 with the broad purpose of coordinating the activities of its members and providing assistance in handling problems common to the Northwest tree fruit industry. The Council's current work focuses on national and international policy issues affecting growers and shippers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

He shared that Washington tree fruit generates \$2.5 billion in sales each year as it moves from orchard to packing house to consumer. About 98% of the fruit is shipped out of state. There are about 500 thousand truckloads shipped in Central Washington annually, with 95 percent of that moved to final destination by truck. Although rail is not a mainstay, the Council encourages WSDOT's support of rail as an alternative.

Over 90 percent of cherries are exported by plane and must be off the tree and overseas in 48 hours. There is not enough lift out of SeaTac Airport to ship all the cherries. About 50 percent of fruit is exported. Mountain pass closures can mean that apples will literally "miss the boat".

Yakima Valley Growers and Shippers Association is a supporter of the Deep Bore Tunnel to replace the Viaduct. Although there is concern that light rail placement on I-90 will slow down cherry shipment.

FOCUS ON RURAL ROADS

Report on All-Weather Roads Conference

Mark Kushner, Executive Director, Benton-Franklin Council of Governments, provided examples of all-weather roads that carry crops to market. He noted that there are over 800 miles of this type of roadway within the three-county area. He explained the criteria used to determine all-weather roads and how transportation projects are prioritized accordingly. He suggested that the state should have an all weather roads program. At last year's All Weather Road (AWR) conference a criteria was established to delineate an AWR by establishing it's connectivity to the highway system; conditions and gaps in the system; safety and season of haul commodity.

Gary Ekstedt, Yakima County Engineer, noted that there are more than 900 miles of farm to market local access roads in Yakima County. He explained that it's unfortunate that these roads are not eligible for federal funds.

Traffic Safety on rural roads

Lowell Porter, Executive Director, Washington State Traffic Safety Commission, shared Washington traffic data information on traffic crash trends. He emphasized that over 80 percent of vehicle crashes are as a result of driver error. Four out of five traffic deaths involve impaired driving, speeding, or failure to use a seat belt, or some combination of these three factors. This comes with a cost of approximately \$5.8 billion to Washington's economy annually. Target Zero is used to improve traffic safety in Washington through a data driven, evidence based, integrated systems approach. A decline in traffic fatality trends can directly be attributed to this approach. Clearly the Target Zero strategy has been successful, but the aim is zero fatalities by 2030, which requires a decrease in the fatality trend by 25 lives each year to meet this goal. Yakima County and the Tri Cities have a very high fatality rate per capita where 50 percent of the fatalities involve impaired driving as opposed to 38 percent statewide.

Edica Esqueda, Sunnyside Police Department, shared that she coordinates the Target Zero Task Force for Yakima and Klickitat Counties. She explained that there are 24 coordinators statewide that assist with the local implementation of Target Zero initiatives like X-52 (extra patrol every week) and DHGN (Drive Hammered Get Nailed).

Sergeant Ed McAvoy, Washington State Patrol, shared that there are a disproportionate number of fatalities on the reservation. About 60 percent of the fatalities were not wearing a seatbelt with over half DUI. He explained that state troopers investigate fatal and serious injury collisions on county roads and state highways in Yakima County. He noted that Director Porter has met with the Yakama Tribal Council to talk about how to reduce reservation fatalities.

Police Chief Ken Hoptowit, Yakama Nation, shared that the Traffic Safety Commission has helped the Yakama Nation purchase Preliminary Breath Testers to assist patrol officers with detecting DUI violators. He shared that at one point a Safety Corridor Project helped traffic fatalities drop from 54 per year to 24 and then zero fatalities the following year. He also noted that many of the fatalities on the reservation are pedestrians. Working with the Traffic Safety Commission and providing education in the schools really worked. Another factor in reducing major crime in the area was working with the community and moving the Yakama

Nation Police Station from Toppenish to White Swan. He explained that the current campaign is working well because of forming partnerships that are willing to meet the challenges.

Commissioner O'Neal expressed that rural road safety is an important issue and the Commission is supportive and willing to help in any way that it can.

Mr. Porter emphasized that WSDOT engineers are coming around to the idea of thinking that drivers are a big part of the problem. They are looking at new strategies that are lower-cost, near-term enhancements such as rumble strips, cable barriers, better lighting and signage. Portable signs are used in the area, but need to be used along with enforcement. In closing he shared that not only are cultural barriers being addressed with the Yakama Nation, but also with the Hispanic community by going into workplaces and orchards. This is also helping to increase licensure and knowledge of the rules. The WSP documented 11 deaths during one harvest season that were all Hispanic surnames and all involved alcohol. The regions population can grow by 125 thousand during the harvest season.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Paul Locke, citizen, talked about Sound Transit borrowing money to fund infrastructure. Federal funds have been depleted, so now they have to borrow. It's the same thing with the ferry system's financial problems and now they want to raise property taxes. Do away with the Port Townsend route to save money. We need to start looking at ways to reduce costs because we just don't have the money. In downtown Seattle they used concrete on Stewart Street and it will probably hold up. This is a step in the right direction.

Connie Little, Research Specialist, Pacific Northwest States, shared that she supports an all-weather way to get across Snoqualmie Pass via a toll tunnel system under the Cascade mountain range. She also believes that this toll tunnel would be very useful as an escape route in the event of an emergency. She expressed that another toll tunnel is needed at the Columbia River crossing near Vancouver/Portland.

ROUTE JURISDICTION TRANSFER

Proposed SR 908 Route transfer

Steve Gorcester, Executive Director, Transportation Improvement Board, spoke briefly regarding the requested SR 908 route jurisdiction transfer between Redmond and Kirkland. He explained that most of the process has been completed by TIB. The last step will be the Commission's approval and adoption of the final finding. Once the Commission approves the finding it will be forwarded to the legislature along with agency request legislation. He provided a brief overview of the RJT and the cities' reasoning that SR 908 no longer meets the state's criteria of a regional highway. Reema Griffith, Executive Director, WSTC, noted that the Commission will take action on the final finding at its October meeting.

2011 BUDGET DECISION PACKAGES

Reema Griffith, Executive Director, WSTC, presented a proposal for Commission action on three supplemental budget request packages to put forward to OFM as follows:

Web page migration/development to DIS

It was moved by Commissioner O'Neal and seconded by Commissioner Hill to approve the supplemental budget request for web page migration to DIS.

Commissioner Distler amended the motion to include general blog capabilities. The motion passed unanimously.

Economic Impact Study of Ferry Service and Fares on Ferry Served Communities

It was moved by Commissioner O'Neal and seconded by Commissioner Hill to approve the supplemental budget request for study funding. The motion passed three "yes" and one "no".

Peer Tolling Advisement

It was moved by Commissioner Distler and seconded by Commissioner Moser to approve a supplemental budget request to fund this project. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5 p.m., on September 22, 2009.

This meeting has been recorded. If you would like additional meeting details, tapes are available for a nominal fee. Please contact the Transportation Commission Office at (360)705-7070.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CAROL MOSER, Chair

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Vice Chair

ABSENT

PHILIP PARKER, Member

LATISHA HILL, Member

ABSENT

DICK FORD, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

ELMIRA FORNER, Member

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ABSENT

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Governor's Office

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL